

**Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Benchmark School  
592 West 1350 South  
Woods Cross, Utah 84087**

**March 25, 2005**



Utah State Office of Education  
250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Benchmark School  
592 West 1350 South  
Woods Cross, Utah 84087**

**March 25, 2005**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

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## **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 25, 2005, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Benchmark School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Roy Stephenson, Director of Education, is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Benchmark School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Benchmark School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

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Executive Officer

**Twila B. Affleck**

Secretary

\*Board of Regents Appointments

1/3/2005

# **BENCHMARK SCHOOL**

## **Board of Directors**

John Holter ..... Hospital CEO  
Bret Marshall, M.D. .... Medical Director  
Jerome Vance, M.D. .... President, Medical Staff  
Larry Pieretti ..... Corporate Vice President  
Alisa Sorenson, R.N. .... Director of Clinical Services  
Tori Weight, R.N. .... Performance Improvement Director  
Lloyd Burton, Ph.D. .... Community Board Member  
Phil Fast, M.S. .... Community Board Member

## **School Administration and Staff**

Roy Stephenson ..... Director of Education

## **Faculty**

Clay Brcko ..... History/Algebra/Russian  
Steven McCormick ..... Mathematics/Physics  
Linda Hardy ..... English/Spanish  
Shauna Orullian ..... PhysEd/Journalism  
Jennifer Madden ..... Psychology/Reading  
Roy Stephenson ..... History/Geography/Earth Science

## **Support Staff/Services**

Alisa Sorenson ..... Director of Clinical Services  
James Rokop ..... Psychologist  
Jennifer Merrill ..... Recreational Therapy  
Kelley Salvesen ..... Maintenance  
Dave Atkinson ..... Maintenance  
Larry Breon ..... Cafeteria Services  
Shauna Orullian ..... Librarian

## **Therapists**

Ann Erickson	Shane Harmon	Craig Scholnick
Mannix Glines	Tami Harris	Talona Talbot
David Guymon	Larry Jeffs	

## **BENCHMARK SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Benchmark School, in partnership with clients and healthcare providers, is to empower students/clients with the knowledge, skills, motivation and state of literacy, which will lead them to be self-sufficient, productive, responsible citizens and life-long learners.

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- Provide high quality education
- Provide education at the appropriate level
- Create a positive learning environment
- Allocate resources for achievement of goals
- Attract and retain professional dedicated staff
- Conduct affairs with integrity

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Ralph P. Vander Heide, Ph.D., Consultant in School Accreditation,  
Visiting Team Chairperson

Judith H. Vander Heide, Consultant in School Accreditation



## **VISITING TEAM REPORT**

### **BENCHMARK SCHOOL**

#### **CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

Benchmark School was established in July 1986 in order to comply with state laws to provide education for adolescent clients who were absent from their regular schools for more than 10 days. Jim Burt and later George Mitchell were the directors of the educational program; both were certified in special education and held M.Ed. degrees. Referral sources also required an in-house school program for their clients, and some clients were referred to Benchmark because of its special education program.

Today Benchmark serves approximately 80 students (male only) as a “special purpose school.” There are 6.5 teachers, several teacher aides, several nurses, eight therapists, and various support personnel. The student/teacher ratio is 12.9 to one, and the student/teaching assistant ratio is 6.4 to one.

The intent of the school/hospital is to provide a highly structured and safe learning environment for young men (ages 13 to 21) who are struggling with impulse or conduct disorder issues. While provisions are in place to issue high school diplomas for students who earn the 24 hours of credit required by the State of Utah, it is not the intent of Benchmark Behavioral Hospital to house students throughout the traditional four-year high school period.

Length of stay varies by residential unit, of which there are five: Juvenile Sex Offenders (JSO), Behavioral Unit (BU), Developmentally Delayed Unit (DDU), Fetal Alcohol Unit (FAS), and Young Adult Offenders (YAO—ages 18-21) who, under Utah law, must be separated from the youth offenders. The DDU and FAS units are subdivisions of the JSO and BU units. The DDU provides for sex offenders who have developmental problems, and the FAS unit serves students of the Behavioral Unit who are medically diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The average length of stay is as follows: JSO and DDU, 18-24 months; YAO, 24 months; BU, 12-18 months; FAS, no average stay determined. The FAS was established less than one year ago.

Benchmark operates year round and has three terms per year. Students are enrolled and discharged randomly throughout the year. Therefore, much of the designated course work is to be accomplished at an individual pace, and 50 percent of the students have individual educational plans. More emphasis is placed on the amount and quality of the study completed than on time in class. However, students attend class seven hours per day and meet the state requirements for total class hours. Courses are designed to require a minimum of 60 hours peer semester credit (0.5).

Student performance data is taken shortly after admittance to Benchmark. Exit performance data is administered to students when they remain at the school for more than one year. Testing measures include the Wide Range Aptitude Test (WRAT), the Wechsler Intelligence Achievement Test (WIAT) and the Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement.

Benchmark uses the Restorative Justice model of behavioral management. Until recently the Positive Peer Culture model was used.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

The school staff was made sharply aware that it did not have an “exit data collection program.” It was observed that the weakest academic area was mathematics (thinking and reasoning skills). It was learned that communication skills, along with thinking and reasoning, should be given the highest priority for improvement.

b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

The school should report more detailed information on the faculty and administration (degrees, years of experience, etc.). Also, follow-up studies are needed to determine what students do after they leave Benchmark.

### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

The Visiting Team finds that it would be helpful to include in future self-studies more information on the faculty and administration. The school should consider including years of experience, years at Benchmark, degrees, universities attended, and other descriptive data. See b) above.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The term “school community” does not apply to persons outside of the school since no parents are involved, nor is the community of Woods Cross/Bountiful. The young men attending the school are all from out of state. Many have simply been abandoned, or parents and family have given up on trying to help them (as have, in some cases, the authorities in their home states who help juvenile offenders). The Visiting Team observed, however, that within the school all employees (not just teachers) appeared to have worked most collaboratively and cooperatively on the

self-study process with the purpose of helping these youngsters to the greatest extent possible.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The staff is very forthright in recognizing weaknesses and appears to be objective in identifying the school's strengths. Faculty members and administrators recognize the need for collaboration among departments. It appears that cooperation is a common goal for all persons working at Benchmark. Survey data substantiates this effort made by the school community. It appears to the Visiting Team that stakeholders are involved in a process of continuous improvement and that each is personally committed to the improvement of student learning.

### **CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Benchmark's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

1. Thinking and Reasoning
2. Communication Skills

Each of the above is broken down into specific objectives such as: "Students will solve problems using special and logical reasoning, applications of geometric principals and modeling," and "Students use process strategies before during and after composing."

#### **Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:**

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

This is done to a great extent. Stakeholder groups with whom the Visiting Team spoke commended the collaboration that takes place at Benchmark. A consensus-building process has been established that involves the school "family" in defining the beliefs, mission, and goals of the school. The mission statement describes the purpose and direction for the school and reflects a focus on student learning as the top priority for the school. The beliefs and mission are aligned, as are learning outcomes (DRSLs). They are free of jargon. The school's belief statements address key issues pertinent to effective decision-making and policy development. It appears that the implications of the school's commitment to acting upon the beliefs

were fully considered prior to finalizing the list of beliefs. The mission and beliefs describe a compelling purpose and direction for the school.

- b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

This has been accomplished to a great extent. The beliefs aligned with the mission statement reflect a commitment to student learning as the top priority of the school. Furthermore, the school's mission and beliefs align to support the established DRSLs. See item *a)* above.

### **Curriculum Development:**

- a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The teachers and administration deserve to be highly complimented on their effort to accomplish this.

- b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The Visiting Team found that the entire teaching staff, as well as aides, nurses, and administrators, understand and have a commitment to achieving the DRSLs.

### **Quality Instructional Design:**

- a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

This is accomplished. All teachers recognize that many special approaches are needed for the special needs students.

- b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

See *a)* above.

- c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

Teachers are innovative and well trained. They are constantly seeking to provide productive additional (new) learning opportunities.

**Quality Assessment Systems:**

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

Assessments are both formative and summative, and are used for accountability as well as for improvement of the teaching/learning process. Assessments are fair and equitable.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

Teachers use such methods.

**Leadership for School Improvement:**

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

There is strong leadership in evidence at Benchmark that achieves the above.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision-making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

The Visiting Team observed that the leadership is strongly committed to this.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

This is ongoing. See other comments under “assessment.”

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

The leadership does this in cooperation with the hospital and corporate administration and the board of trustees.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSs, and school improvement efforts?*

The Visiting Team noted strong commitment to the above.

### **Community Building:**

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

As noted elsewhere in this report, there is a family atmosphere at Benchmark. The commitment to collegiality and sharing is commendable.

### **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

Staff members expressed appreciation for commitment to the above.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

All stakeholders, including the administration of the school, the corporate administration, and the board of trustees, are committed to the above. For example, funds are readily provided for identified needs for improvement (equipment, texts, teacher in-service, etc.).

## **CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI**

The Visiting Team notes that the Utah Accreditation Committee assigned Benchmark an “approved” rating on its most recent (Oct. 2004) annual report on the NAAS standards.

### **Standard I – Educational Program**

This standard is met. Benchmark’s instructional and organizational practices, as well as its policies and procedures, support the desired results for student learning. Great effort is made to prepare these special needs students to succeed in society. The curriculum is based on the Utah State Core Curriculum and Utah Life Skills

## **Standard II – Student Personnel Services**

This standard is well met. Student personnel services are designed to give systematic assistance to students. The assigned personnel for guidance include a minimum of one full-time person for each 400 students (only 80 are enrolled). Benchmark has aides, nurses, therapists, and psychologists who do counseling

## **Standard III – School Plant and Equipment**

The school plant provides for accommodating all the special needs students who attend Benchmark. This standard is met.

## **Standard IV – Library Media Program**

The school library media program is a resource for literacy, information, and curriculum support. A certified “consultant librarian” who works in the Davis County School District is on call to provide instruction and assistance as needed. The library is growing and improving. Funds have been budgeted for monthly purchases of materials.

## **Standard V – Records**

Student records are maintained, handled, and protected in the best interests of students. Students, parents, and other legally designated persons have the right to access personal student records, and are ensured privacy of such, as guaranteed by federal legislation. The standard is met.

## **Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)**

This standard is met. The school improvement plan focuses on the total school program (all five divisions or “units”) and is based on three primary DRSLs.

## **Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel**

This standard is met. All professional personnel are in compliance with the licensing requirements of the State of Utah and are properly endorsed for the subjects they are assigned. All teachers at Benchmark are certified in special education or in the process of being so certified. The school requires special education certification.

## **Standard VIII – Administration**

This standard is met. The administration of Benchmark provides strong educational leadership, supervises and coordinates programs, and carries out necessary and required administrative procedures.

### **Standard IX – Teacher Load**

This standard is met. The total number of students instructed by any one teacher in any one grading period does not exceed numbers set by the Utah State Office of Education and/or NAAS. The ratio is approximately 12 to 1.

### **Standard X – Activities**

This standard is met. Benchmark provides an adequate range of activities for these special needs students.

### **Standard XI – Business Practices**

This standard is met. The school is financially responsible. Proper budgetary procedures and generally accepted accounting principles are followed for handling school funds. It appears that the school's advertising and promotional literature are completely truthful and ethical.

## **CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN**

- a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The school-wide action plan is excellent. All aspects have been well thought out and detailed.

- b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide?*

As has been repeatedly noted in this report, commitment is school-wide and extends to corporate commitment.

- c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?*

The follow-up plans are commendable. Responsibilities, resources, etc. are listed in detail.



## **CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the school for its comprehensive self-study, which followed in detail the suggested outline of the National Study of School Evaluation.
- The Visiting Team commends all staff members at Benchmark for their hospitality and frank appraisal of the school.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for the quality of its staff (degrees, experience, and special education training).
- The Visiting Team commends the entire staff for working cooperatively and congenially (like a “family”) in behalf of students.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty for its devotion to improving the lives of these special needs young men, in spite of difficulties and limitations imposed by those special needs.
- The Visiting Team commends the CEO of the hospital for attending all meetings during the evaluation visit.
- The Visiting Team commends the Educational Director for having effected positive change during his relatively short term in his position, which including the completion of certification requirements in education administration.
- The Visiting Team commends the staff for ongoing commitment to improvement of the library and the Board for allocating funds for that improvement.
- The Visiting Team commends the Board for readily providing funds for justified educational purposes.
- The Visiting Team commends the staff for offering quality field trips that augment the daily educational program.
- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark Behavioral Health Systems for providing stress counseling for staff members.
- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark Behavioral Health Systems for obtaining certification by the Joint Commission of Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO).

- The Visiting Team commends the Board for providing in-service for staff (also, see recommendations).

**Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school initiate a systematized, longitudinal study of students after they leave Benchmark. There is a strong need for such follow-up.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the Board consider teachers' requests for specific in-service needs which are not provided at the present time. (Some teachers expressed a desire for a wider variety of in-service.)
- The Visiting Team recommends that the staff, administration, and Board provide more periodicals that are written specifically for Native Americans. Many students at Benchmark are Native Americans.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school improvement team rewrite the school's six belief statements to clarify the meaning in terms of student attributes.